



State of the Signal Corps

MG Michael Ackerman, Chief of Signal, kicked off the 1997 Signal symposium with some comments on what the Signal Corps had been doing in the past year and what it needs to do.

"It seems just like yesterday when I stood up here for the 24th symposium. Time flies when you're having fun, and it really has flown this past year," he said. "As I stood up here last year, we talked about the fact that we were getting ready to go into the brigade (advanced warfighting experiment) at Fort Irwin, (Calif.), where we were going to test and look at the digitized brigade."

The Signal Corps has been "around the world" in 1997, Ackerman said. Signal soldiers have been in the Sinai Desert for 15 years, in Bosnia for several years, in Macedonia for five years, and in places like Guatemala, Honduras or Peru. Some of these deployments have been small teams, rather than large-scale.

Signal soldiers have also supported exercises through the battle-command training program, National Training Center rotations, Joint Readiness Training Center rotations or through "warfighter" exercises, in addition to the brigade and division AWEs in the past year.

"(They've been in) every kind of exercise you could imagine,"

Ackerman said, "and I've got to tell you, as the Chief of Signal, I couldn't be more proud of (their) performance. Everywhere I go, I have commanders — from four-star level to brigade level — tell me ... they appreciate the support they're getting."

Looking at the future, Ackerman said, "The strategy of our Army depends on information dominance and the digitization of the force. Whether we agree with it or not, that decision has been made. We've got to do it, and we've got to do it right. Because if we don't, we're going to fail. There's no room in this world for second place, so we can't fail."

Noting lessons-learned from Force XXI exercises at Fort Hood, Texas, he said, "Are we there? No. We've got a long way to go. The exercises ... at Fort Hood show we've still got a lot to do. That's where teaming with industry comes in. Some of the things done (at Fort Hood) were the first time we've done things of that nature: spiral development, (combined training-support centers and central training facilities) ... where we brought (people) together to solve our problems.

"Were we able to support people on those operations? Yes, we were. Were we able to support them in the manner we want to? No, we

could not," the Chief of Signal said.

The first digitized division, Ackerman said, will be fielded in the year 2000, unless plans change. "That means we've got to have equipment that will provide (warfighters) the 'pipes' so they can move data rapidly around the battlefield, no matter where they're at, no matter how large the battlespace, or how far apart they are," Ackerman said. "Industry, or technology, will give us the capability to do that, but we've still got a ways to go."

The Signal Corps will have fielded the terrestrial portion of the Warfighter Information Network, plus super-high-frequency triband advanced range-extension terminals; secure, mobile, antijam, reliable, tactical terminals; and "a bunch of other systems that will help us" by 2000, Ackerman said. "But we don't have just the right switch yet, or just the right high-capacity line-of-sight trunk radio," he said.

A major concern to the Chief of Signal is training. "We're not postured today at the Signal Center to produce the kind of folks who are going to be able to do the mission they're going to have to do in the digitized world," he said. "That worries me a great deal, and should worry all of you, ... because right now, the soldiers who are going through (advanced individual

training) will not go to another school before they will be operating the equipment in that first digitized division and that first digitized corps. The ... captains who are in the advanced course will still not have been to another technical course. So we've got to change the way we're training to prepare the force better.

"That means more automation, more knowledge of what the warfighter does out there, what the terminology is, how we can support them all the way from that S-6 down at the battalion level, all the way up to the strategic level, and back into the sustaining base. That's (the Signal Corps') battlespace: all the way from the foxhole to the sustaining base, back into (the continental United States), back into those areas controlled by the (directorates of information management)."

"So we've got to make changes," Ackerman said. "We've

got to make sure we're bringing in (to the Signal Corps) the right kind of soldiers able to do the kinds of things we want them to do."

While he was at the brigade and division AWEs, he said, people asked him his thoughts and feelings. "My feelings ranged from totally ecstatic down to 'How are we going to do that? How are we going to be able to move that kind of information around for them?'" he said. "And then I stepped back from that. We're focusing on the digitization of the Army at Fort Hood, but we've got all the rest of the Army that's doing the 'little d,' or modernization (the 'little digitization'). ... And that's not little at all."

The Chief of Signal has directed his staff to review Signal military-occupation specialties, of which there are now 18. "Technology is going to allow us to reduce that number," he said. "We'll

probably have some more (additional skill identifiers), though, because we'll have to be able to identify special skills. We've got to do that very carefully ... so that's why I've started (my staff) looking at that today. That's at the top of the plate as to how we're going to be organized in our career fields to be able to support the force in the future and have information dominance on the battlefield."

*Note: the State of the Signal Corps speech, and all following articles on symposium guest speakers, were excerpted by **Army Communicator** editor Lisa Alley.*

Acronym Quick-scan

AWE —advanced warfighting experiment
MOS —military-occupation specialty